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Board OK's 45-day solar moratorium

On a 5-0 vote, the San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors Wednesday approved a temporary moratorium on new industrial-scale solar projects in unincorporated communities.

The 45-day moratorium is aimed at protecting rural neighborhoods from solar projects which can hurt property values, create dust, blight, reflected light and can be an eyesore.

"I think today's unanimous vote shows the need for a thoughtful and balanced approach to locating industrial-scale solar plants," First District Supervisor Robert Lovingood said. "San Bernardino County welcomes renewable energy project applications, but we need this 45-day window to open a dialog on this issue and review our policies."

The ordinance temporarily puts on hold any unapproved industrial solar projects. Solar projects that have already been accepted and approved are not affected by the moratorium.

The solar moratorium will allow the county to adequately plan for these projects and to incorporate a renewable energy component into its General Plan, which will be addressed later this summer.

Residents from around the High Desert have grown increasingly concerned about mixing industrial solar projects in rural residential neighborhoods. About 30 solar projects slated for the First District are currently in the county pipeline.

The issue extends beyond the First District. Third District Supervisor James Ramos has also heard from concerned residents of the Morongo Basin.

"As we prepare to become the most coveted county in America with the greatest solar resources and over 50 percent of the DRECP (Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan) Planning Area in California, San Bernardino County needs to update its General Plan and incorporate renewable energy into it, in order to handle the anticipated wave of applications and solar developments likely to come over the next several years," Ramos said. "This moratorium provides an opportunity for the County to develop a plan that can become a model for other areas affected by these projects."

Lovingood said he believes those within the solar industry want to be good neighbors.

"The moratorium," he said, "will give all parties a chance to bring their issues to the table so we can find an equitable compromise."